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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, 2001

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Inquiring Words

Come sit by our fire and let us share stories. Let me hear your tales of far-off lands, wanderer, and I will tell you of my travels. Share your experience of the holy with me, worshipper, and I will tell you of that which I find divine. Come and stay, lover of leaving, for ours is no caravan of despair, but of hope.

We would hear your stories of grief and sorrow as readily as those of joy and laughter, for there is a time and a place and a hearing for all the stories of this world. Stories are the breath and word of the spirit of life, that power that we name love. Come, for our fire is warm and we have seats for all.

Come, again and yet again, come speak to me of what fills your heart, what engages your mind, what resides in your soul. Come, let us worship together.

Written by Jennifer Kitchen this piece is inspired by, and contains phrases from, the Rumi poem that Lynn Ungar put to music as the hymn 'Come, Come, Whoever You Are'.

Correction

In the 23 February issue of The Inquirer, the details for the 'Forgotten Women of Wakefield' celebration of International Women's day were incorrect. These are the corrected event listings: 8 March: 16-18:00, Westgate Chapel hosts Cuckoos Nest theatre group giving readings in the catacombs.

19:00, 'Difficult Women' a play on local 'herstory' at the Mechanics Theatre, Wood Street, Wakefield

9 March: 10-00-18:00 Festival of Forgotten Women at Mechanics Theatre, Wood Street The day's events will include a film about Kate Taylor, well-known Unitarian.

10 March: 15:00-16:00 Westgate Unitarian Chapel service to commemorate Women.

For more information see: <https://forgottenwomenwake.com>

Church is made for the imperfect

By Kath Forder

This piece was inspired by these words of Simon Parke, from a piece titled 'On being repulsive' in a collection called *One Minute Mystic*:

It is a serious mistake to make religion out of our best bits: the things you like about yourself and do rather well. No. Religion should fearlessly be constructed out of our worst bits; our most repulsive moments.

Have you ever heard this sort of comment? 'Look at her! She's always angry, always shouting at people. I don't know how her family copes ... and she goes to church!'

It's one I remember an aunt saying about various instances of 'wrongful behaviour' that she saw in her neighbours. She never went to church, so she was exempt from such comments. Now, in saying that, she was assuming that churches must only contain 'nice', 'good', 'perfect' people – saints who behave properly to each other and to everybody else all the time. What I'm not sure about is whether she thought that churches barred everyone else from membership, or whether the act of going to church was sufficient to make people 'good'. Or maybe she was saying that the church was responsible for the woman's behaviour, and that they should prevent her from behaving badly...

Either way, it doesn't work like that. Churches are not collections of perfect people.

Jesus welcomed sinners

Jesus certainly felt that churches – or rather synagogues – should welcome people who weren't 'perfect'. The New Testament is full of the horrified expressions of those around him, especially the Pharisees, but even of some of his disciples, because he associated with 'tax gatherers and publicans'; he accepted invitations to meals with them, allowed an immoral woman to wash his feet, talked with – and touched – lepers, and even had a private conversation with a Samaritan woman!

On his website, gotquestions.org, S. Michael Houdmann tells us:

In Jesus' day, rabbis and other spiritual leaders were the highest members of Jewish society. Everyone looked up to the Pharisees. They were strict adherents to the Law and tradition, and they avoided those whom they deemed 'sinners' because they had a 'clean' image to maintain. Tax collectors, infamous for embezzlement and their cooperation with the hated Romans, definitely fell into the sinner' category.

So 'tax gatherers and publicans' was a catchall phrase meaning those who are unworthy, almost the lowest of the low – I suspect that adulterers and 'ladies of the night' were lower.

Luke tells a parable of the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18: 10-14):

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee,



Jesus befriends Zaccheus, the tax collector. Sculptor, Dominico Mostrianni. A Noyer, via Wikimedia

and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess'. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Social misfits

In some translations, the publican is described as a tax collector instead, but the idea is the same – they are social (and religious) misfits, and the Pharisee believes

himself to be better than they are. In some ways, he is. He hasn't merely fulfilled his obligations under Jewish law, but has exceeded them. He gives tithe on all his gains, not just of what the law demanded. He fasts two days each week, as the priests did, when as a member of the congregation, one fast per year would have been sufficient. But ...

Matthew Henry, the 18th-century non-conformist minister, writes in his *Commentary*: *And was he as much pleased with the publican's perceived 'badness' as with his own goodness? There could not be a plainer evidence, not only of the want of humility and charity, but of reigning pride and malice, than this was.*

The Pharisee was definitely making religion out of what he considered to be his 'best bits' ... and making sure that everybody knew about it.

Jesus wanted his listeners to realise that the Pharisee's apparently devout behaviour was rooted in his pride and arrogance, and he tells them that the one who is worthy of admiration is the one who brought his whole self to the synagogue, admitting his flaws and praying for wholeness.

I believe that we are all ordinary people; no one is 100% saint or 100% evil, and that there is no such thing as perfection, especially when applied to a human being. I suspect that Joy Croft is right, that Jesus and others whose teachings we admire and follow had their off-days too and got it wrong sometimes. (*Ordinary People*, printed in *Waiting to be Discovered*)

Joy also says: *We too with all our flaws are human.*

Do we too carry within us wisdom that might change the world?

Is there divine light within you or me, waiting to be discovered?

Good and evil are not opposites – we are not one or the other. Rather, they are the end points on a seesaw that dips first at one end, then the other, all through our lives. In the chapter of *The Prophet* relating to crime and punishment, Kahlil Gi-

(Continued on next page)

EC welcomes new chief officer

Executive Committee Key Messages 25 January 2019

1. New Chief Officer

The Executive Committee ratified the appointment of Elizabeth Slade as Chief Officer and commended the members of the Recruitment Panel and the General Assembly's HR Adviser for their work over the previous year. An induction programme was supported for the handover period with the current Chief Officer, Derek McAuley, from 18 March 2019 until 30 April 2019. During this time Elizabeth would visit Unitarian and Free Christian congregations in various parts of the country as well as acclimatising at Essex Hall.

2. General Assembly Vice-President

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that Anne Mills will be nominated for the position of Vice-President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year commencing 18 April 2019, leading to the Presidency in 2020-2021. We congratulate Anne and thank her for agreeing to serve.

Anne is a lifelong Unitarian and an active member of Bury Unitarian Church. She has held many offices in the congregation and has been Traidcraft organiser for 14 years. Since 2015 she has been Secretary of the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry. She is a member of the Women's League and is a frequent contributor to *The Inquirer* and *The Unitarian*.

3. General Assembly Roll of Ministers and Lay Pastors

The recommendations of the Ministry Strategy Group and Interview Panel were approved and we are pleased to announce:

a) That the following were approved for entry into ministry training:

- Robin Hanford at Harris Manchester College, Oxford
- Laura Dobson and Rory Castle-Jones at Unitarian College

b) That, having successfully completed their probationary period, the following be added to the Roll of Ministers with Full status: the Rev Phil Waldron and the Rev Kate McKenna:

c) That, having successfully completed a transition programme, the Rev Mária Pap be added to the Roll of Ministers with Probationary status.

4. Role of Districts

A discussion took place on organisational effectiveness and growth, including the role that District Associations might play, and it was agreed that this subject would be revisited with the new Chief Officer as part of an overall review. It was recognised that these issues needed to be explored with the wider Unitarian movement and District Associations. Sharing good practice was seen as essential to supporting growth.

5. Annual Reports and Annual Accounts 2017 – 2018

The Annual Reports and Annual Accounts of the General Assembly and the Nightingale Centre for 2017 – 2018 were approved.

6. Investment Policy

Further consideration was given to ethical investment as agreed at the November 2018 meeting. A draft Investment Policy, incorporating socially responsible criteria reflecting ethical standards, was endorsed with implementation subject to expert investment advice being obtained and subsequent adoption by the Executive Committee.

7. Stipend Review Committee

A report was received from the Stipend Review Committee following its meeting on 14 January 2019 and was approved for presentation to the Annual Meeting.

8. Executive Committee Workshop

The Executive Committee Workshop at the Annual Meetings would take the form of 'Frequently Asked Questions' so look out for further information on how these should be submitted.

Sponsored column

It is possible to be holy and wicked

(Continued from previous page)

bran writes:

Offentimes have I heard you speak of one who commits a wrong as though he were not one of you, but a stranger unto you and an intruder upon your world.

But I say that even as the holy and the righteous cannot rise beyond the highest which is in each one of you, so the wicked and the weak cannot fall lower than the lowest which is in you also.

There but for the grace of God

What he's saying is that we each contain the potential to be holy and wicked, virtuous and weak-willed. It's part of being human. *There, but for the grace of God, go I.*

Our shadow side is always with us, and we have to learn to live with that knowledge. Though the analogy of a shadow doesn't really fit very well. Our physical bodies cast their strongest, blackest shadows in the brightest light. But our soul's shadow is strongest when we are in the darkest places. Isn't it easier to be 'good' – listening to people, treating them kindly – when our own life is going well? And aren't we more likely to hurt other people when we are in a painful place ourselves?

On his blog, Simon Parke says that his ambition is to be happy in his own skin because everything else flows from that. Because we are human, and thus fallible, being happy in our

own skin means accepting ourselves, flaws and all; acknowledging that we make mistakes, we aren't perfect, we don't get it right all the time. And because we are social animals, it also means accepting that other people are not perfect either.

Perhaps knowing that other people are just like us, that they experience the highs and the lows, just like we do, that they get it wrong sometimes just like we do, might make us more forgiving of error – in ourselves and in others.

So, to paraphrase Andy Pakula, who wrote these words to open a service:

[When you] come into this circle of community, into this sacred space, be not tentative

.[Come as you are], bring your whole self!

Bring the joy that makes your heart sing.

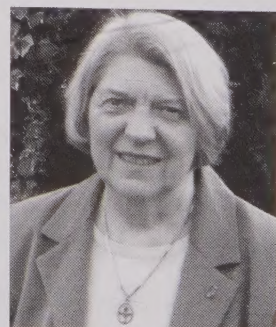
Bring your kindness and your compassion.

Bring also your sorrow, your pain.

Bring your brokenness and your disappointments.

for only by learning to live amidst our worst bits will we be happy in our own skins and truly loving of others.

Kath Forder is a Unitarian lay pastor.



Live in the now, or in the long moment

My Sundays start quite early in the morning. I often find myself leaving my girlfriend's at 6am to drive back to Altrincham to begin my day. As I do, I turn on the radio. My favourite at this time is a programme on Radio 4 titled 'Something Understood'. It is excellent. A recent episode made reference to the 'Long Now Moment' and the 'Long Now Foundation'. I have to say it spoke to me powerfully as it shared some of my long-held frustrations with some understandings of contemporary spirituality.

I find that the way people talk about 'The Now' or the 'The Present' often feeds into our self-centredness. For me it's not just about living in the moments, but how we live in the time and space we find ourselves – and to truly see that this time and space is connected to all that has ever been, and will ever be. We, and the way we inhabit time and space, really do matter. For it affects everything. It's not that we live passively in the moment, but bring it to life, and thus create a legacy for all that follows. The 'Long Now Moment' speaks powerfully to my heart, my mind and certainly my soul.

The 'Long Now Moment' is inspired by a story, which may well be mythos – but hey, stories are all about mythos – a story of rotting Oak Beams in New College Oxford. The college was founded in the 14th century. At its heart lies a dining hall that features expansive oak beams across its ceiling. Now these great beams had lasted about 500 years, but during the late 19th century an entomologist discovered that they were infested with beetles and needed replacing. This was a big problem for the college as such beams, of sufficient size and quality, would be hard to find and expensive.

One of the college's junior fellows suggested that there might be some worthy oaks within the college lands. The college had, when it was formed, been endowed with land scattered around England and run by the college forester.

The forester was called in and asked if there were any such oaks on the college lands. He paused for a moment and then a reassuring expression appeared on his face and he said, 'Well sirs, we was wonderin' when you'd be askin.' It seems that when the College had been founded a grove of oaks had been planted to replace the beams in the dining hall when they became beetly, because oak beams always become beetly in the end. It seems that this plan had been passed down from one Forester to the next for over 500 years. Each forester was told, 'You don't cut them oaks. Them's for the College Hall.'

So it would appear that the founders of New College Oxford were not just obsessed with themselves and their time and place. They thought of their legacy, of the generations that followed.

This story, whether true or apocryphal, has become a foundational tale of those who advocate for the 'Long Now Moment', which has developed in response to the fast paced instant society that we live in today, one that does not really think of the future and has a kind of disrespect of the past.

The innovative musician, producer and composer Brian Eno is one of the key proponents of the 'Long Now Moment'. He became interested in long now living after moving to New



Planting a tree is being in the 'long moment'. Pixabay photo by Michael Gaida

From nothing
to everything
by
Danny Crosby



York. He was shocked at how instant and insular the people living there were. It was almost as if nothing existed outside of the moment folk were living in or the windows of the buildings they were enclosed within. He has said: "Now" is never just a moment. The Long Now is the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future. The longer your sense of Now, the more past and future it includes. It's ironic that, at a time when humankind is at a peak of its technical powers, able to create huge global changes that will echo down the centuries, most of our social systems seem geared to increasingly short nows. Huge industries feel pressure to plan for the bottom line and the next shareholders meeting. Politicians feel forced to perform for the next election or opinion poll. The media attract bigger audiences by spurring instant and heated reactions to human interest stories while overlooking longer-term issues – the real human interest.'

As we live day-by-day let's not do so passively living in the short now, thinking only of ourselves and how we feel this moment. Let us extend our compassion beyond the confines of our little egocentric worlds. Let's think beyond the skin and walls we live in and develop compassion not only for those who live today, but for the generations that are yet to come. Let us instead begin to live in the 'Long Now Moment' and expand our empathy and bring the moment that we live in fully alive while remembering all that came before. Let's build a legacy for those who follow, so that our lives will prove worth dying for by the legacies of love that we leave behind.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Urmston and Altrincham.

Atheism and spirituality not mutually ex

Conflating science and religion is a fundamentally ill-conceived endeavour says **Kevin Robinson** in response to the recent cover story, 'Struggling with God'

The recent publication in the pages of this magazine of one of Bill Darlison's sermons ('Struggling with God' *Inquirer*, 17 November) has shaken loose in my mind a number of thoughts, touching on questions of spirituality, science and religion, atheism, and God.

The main propositions I want to address here are likely to be familiar to most readers, perhaps to the point of monotony, but I hope that I can present a thoughtful perspective on some of their implications. The key ideas I will touch upon are as follows:

- Appeals to science (as distinct from logic and reason) are not generally useful or meaningful in spiritual and religious exploration.
- Holding an atheistic position is unrelated to an embrace of scientific thought.
- Atheism need not be a dogmatic or extremist viewpoint.
- Atheism and spirituality are by no means mutually exclusive.
- The over-extension of the concept of 'God' risks rendering the word meaningless.

Liberal, spiritual atheism

My goal is to draw together these threads and present an argument in favour of a liberal and spiritual position within the broad gamut of atheism. I know the idea of the 'spiritual atheist' is widely encountered, and I will avoid that particular term – although it may fit much of what I have to say. While I greatly admire and appreciate Bill's preaching, I feel that he has always been at his weakest when he seeks to appeal to science in support of his arguments. This would seem to be in particular evidence in the article.

In the article, Bill explores the proposition that many Unitarians are perhaps too firmly wedded to the idea of applying scientific thinking both to the big questions in particular and to the spiritual journey in general.

I have no difficulties with this idea. It is a perfectly reasonable and defensible position, which I indeed share. However he then goes on to list a number of 'scientific dogmas' he considers to be more or less 'impossible things', including the theories of evolution and the big bang. After stating 'I am not questioning these scientific theories' he proceeds to spend much of the rest of the article doing exactly that.

There are two important points here. Firstly, that intuition,

as to what might be possible or impossible, does not extend reliably to questions well removed from everyday experience. Secondly, that the problem Bill identifies in relation to the overuse of scientific thinking in matters of religion, is not a problem with science but rather with those who seek to misapply it.

I do not propose to counter the arguments which Bill presents. They do seem to be based on more or less valid, although minority, scientific viewpoints. Rather, I would like to ask the question: are such scientific considerations a useful or potentially fruitful approach to the spiritual questions at the heart of Bill's exploration?

False debate between science and religion

I believe this kind of science-based argument (employed widely on both sides of the 'God' debate) somewhat misrepresents or perhaps misunderstands the relationship between science and religion. To my mind, conflating these two topics is a fundamentally ill-conceived endeavour. For the believer, any scientific explanation of the universe, no matter how complete, can simply be answered with the response, 'that's how God chose to make it'.

Similarly, for the nonbeliever, any mystery – no matter how opaque – can be covered by: 'just because we don't understand it doesn't mean it is beyond explanation'.

Modern scientific theories are indeed beyond the comprehension of most of us, and yes we do, as Bill suggests, take them on faith (as working hypotheses, not ultimate truth). This is however not blind faith, but rather reasoned faith, based on two pillars:

1. Our own scientific education (to whatever level) giving us sufficient understanding to trust in the tools of logic, reason, and proof, and
2. Our subsequent trust in the filter of broad and deep peer review applied by the scientific community, which seeks to constantly revise and refine these theories.

However, the most complete explanation of the workings of the universe still says nothing about whether the laws of physics are thus simply because they are, or because that's the way God decided to make them. In the context of spiritual and religious enquiry, whether from a theistic or an atheistic viewpoint, scientific knowledge (however well understood) is fundamentally the wrong tool to use.

I am an atheist not because science gets my vote. I am an atheist because I have never had any sense that there might be a creative power responsible for all that I am and all that I perceive.

This does not preclude a rich and vital spiritual aspect to

Struggling with God



Bill Darlison argues that Unitarians too easily took the 'primordial soup'

† The INQUIRER

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William Blake's 'Ancient of Days'. Public Domain via

ve: ideas on science, religion and God



my life. Such things may equally well proceed from within me, and through those with whom I share my life. There are indeed aspects of life upon which science has little if anything to say.

For me, a belief in God holds no more compelling a perspective upon these aspects of my existence.

I should say that many of the people I know and respect most profoundly in my life profess a deep and abiding faith in God, and I readily and happily accept that they may well be right and I may well be wrong. I acknowledge also, the real value and importance such faith has to these people, and in no way seek to invalidate these things, regardless of which of us may happen to be correct in our respective answers to this unknowable question.

Given my assertion that atheism is in no way linked to, or dependant upon, a scientific explanation of the universe, I would like to continue by considering the broad, liberal, and spiritually fertile position which I believe atheism can represent. In a letter addressing Bill's article John Watson asks the question 'which god does Bill refer to?', and provides a list of possible definitions, many of which are commonly cited by Unitarians wishing to adjust the concept of God to accommodate their

ahamic interpretation
monisms

own spiritual outlook. I include the list here for reference:

- (a) The Abrahamic god.
- (b) The Hindu gods.
- (c) The will as described by some philosophers.
- (d) Mother nature.
- (e) The big bang.
- (f) The primordial soup.
- (g) Buddhists offer no explanation.

I would contend that some of these (specifically d, e, f, and probably c) cannot reasonably be employed in relation to a definition of God.

Similarly, statements such as 'God is love' have long been expressed, but neither should these be mistaken for attempts at a definition. Their intent has always been (until co-opted by Unitarians amongst others) as statements of various things which it is taken that God is particularly concerned with; aspects, possibly necessary but certainly not sufficient to define God, and, most importantly, fully capable of existing without the existence of God.

Murky meanings for God

The crucial point here is that while (c) to (f) above might constitute aspects in any concept of God, they are ideas whose existence is not dependant upon the existence of God. As such, their use in this manner, as de facto meanings for 'God', must surely be seen as further muddying the already murky waters

of this vexed topic.

Perhaps (g) might in fact be the best path. I do not know much of the Buddhist way, but might it not be a wise thing to embrace the idea that God is so unfathomable that any attempt at a definition will likely be vastly insufficient, and as such better left unsaid. Having just declared myself an atheist, I am perhaps not best placed to pass judgement on such matters. I present the notion merely as a thought in passing, and immediately ignore my own suggestion as I move on.

OED definition is suspect

The OED attempts to define God (with a capital 'g') as: 'the creator and ruler of the universe; the supreme being'. I do not suggest that this be entertained as a complete, or even necessarily correct, definition. It does however point in the direction of the historically established usage. It would therefore seem difficult to defend any idea of God which does not encompass some concept akin to an external, conscious, and deliberate creative power.

Perhaps the ship has sailed on this notion, but I feel that it is a poor idea to embrace the redefining of this word, allowing each of us to tack on whatever suits our own spiritual standpoint. While God is indeed a difficult word to pin down (and has a number of lowercase subsidiary meanings), God in the context of spiritual and religious discourse must surely encompass a few essential attributes. To extend its meaning, in the way many Unitarians wish, would seem to render the word meaningless.

I suspect that this desire to expand the idea of God beyond its original scope stems, at least in part, from an aversion to that other most contentious of labels, 'atheist'. While many Unitarians do believe in some form of a conscious, creative God, might it not be the case that rather more than are willing to embrace the label are in fact atheists?

Atheism does not preclude spirituality

Atheism has an unjustified bad reputation. It is not a dogmatic or extremist position, nor does it preclude a deep spirituality. While a small minority might claim absolute certainty of the non-existence of God (with similar zeal to unquestioning believers), in my experience, most atheists are happy to acknowledge that they could be wrong. It would seem particularly perverse to accept this kind of nuanced position on the part of believers, while at the same time dismissing it in the case of non-believers.

To be clear, a doubting atheist is no more an agnostic than is a doubting believer. Agnostics find themselves unable to arrive at even a tentative conclusion in either direction. In contrast, individual believers and non-believers hold their respective positions despite varying degrees of personal doubt.

While it would be foolish to attempt to arrive at a final definition of 'God', without some set of criteria the word loses all meaning. So if the God you believe in does not, at least in a general sense, conform to the more widely accepted template, might it be the case that you are in fact a liberal, spiritually minded, atheist?

Kevin Robinson is the caretaker at St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church in Dublin.

Derek Stirman, a compassionate man

Derek Stirman
1929-2018

By Tony Cross

I first met Derek at Manchester College Oxford (MCO) in 1961. We were exact contemporaries training for the Unitarian ministry. A firm friendship lasted 58 years. I tried to meet and talk with him every year. He had wretched health over the last years, eventually gave up his car and I then visited him in his Newport home. Three years ago, as I was about to leave, he made a characteristically quirky comment: 'Let's see who goes first!'

When Derek came up to MCO in 1961, he came with a wealth of experience. Enlisted under age in the Navy, his streak of resistance to unjust authority eventually landed him in trouble. He swore at an officer and received a beating. He subsequently contrived his discharge and worked very successfully at WH Smith's in Portsmouth. Involved with the youth club at John Pounds Unitarian church, he was encouraged by the minister, John Sturges, to apply for training. Derek began lay ministry at Newport Unitarian church on the Island. During 14 years, he oversaw the restoration of the 18th-century building and recruited a predominantly young congregation. He also ministered concurrently at Southampton (1965-72) and at Portsmouth, (1968-72).

Derek's nautical background was apparent. Could his ability to doze during Principal Garrard's New Testament lectures have derived from sleeping conditions on board? He preferred life 'ship-shape and Bristol fashion'. His books were arranged in order of height not subject. We would tease him occasionally while he was out of the room, rearranging several of the volumes. It was astonishing how quickly he noticed: 'You devils!' he would exclaim, irritated but amused. It was through one of the devils, Keith Bell, a lifelong friend, that he met Virginia who was working in the Geology Library. They married in November 1964. It was the beginning of a long and happy marriage – a remarkably successful relationship between two independent persons. Those of us who visited their home in the last few years were moved by the extraordinary devotion with which Virginia cared for him.

During his ministry at Newport in 1968 he exchanged pulpits with the minister at Denver Colorado Universalist church. This proved a crucial experience. His Humanist inclinations were reinforced by the liberal ethos of this large congregation. He continued in post in churches of the SUA until 1974, but then sought employment in full-time social work. His experience in the UUA church had been unsettling and life changing. His hostility to orthodoxies and his battles with overbearing authority, were never alienating. His atheism made no breach in any friendship. Derek's deep compassion made him an

admirable fighter for victims of injustice and oppression.

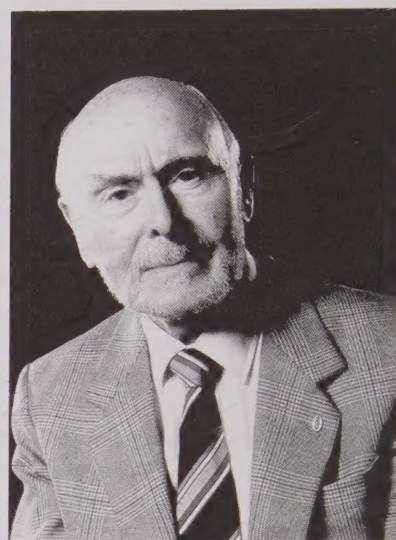
During the late 1970s, Derek became fascinated by the ministry of the human rights campaigner, Haydn Williams – minister of Whitby Unitarian church (1888-1910). Derek assembled a large archive on Williams – a man never intimidated by powers-that-be. One wonders how far Williams

inspired Derek's skirmishes with, for example, the Ferry Company, so that eventually they had to abandon their surcharge for carrying a corpse and were compelled to set aside accommodation on their ships for non-smokers.

Derek never had any formal social work qualification but over the years became a highly respected social worker on the Island. After early experience as a social worker at Whitecroft Hospital, he became Juvenile Court Officer and eventually was occupied in generic social work. He became NALGO representative on the Island. For years he took a special interest in a 'gentleman of the road', Theo, whose mini biography he wrote. Derek retired as a salaried social worker in 1990.

There is a sense that Derek's work for Amnesty International was his second ministry. He had long been involved – founding the Amnesty group on the Island in 1962. A number of members of the Newport church joined. Under his chairmanship, the group's fund-raising activities raised more in 1999 for Amnesty than any other UK group. He was undoubtedly the driving force and, as a tribute, a photographic portrait was commissioned which hangs in the London Amnesty HQ. He was deservedly elected Life President of the Island group. Yet, Amnesty did not exhaust Derek's human rights concerns – he was an active supporter of CND, Liberty and the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture. He was an early supporter of LGBT rights in the denomination.

Derek was unafraid of death – for years he had looked mortality steadfastly in the face. After 1974, no longer in post as a minister, he conducted Humanist funerals on the Isle of Wight. He carefully planned his own funeral. Very well attended, it was held on 3 January this year – a celebration of his life. It was, as he wished, a Humanist funeral, conducted in a public hall and followed by burial in a woodland cemetery.



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Belief is back – just not every week

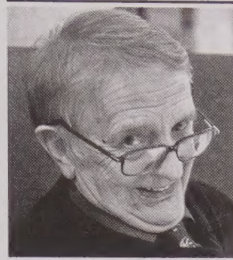
The Church of England has decided that some parish churches can forego holding services every Sunday. Until now, it's been necessary to get permission from their bishop to depart from the weekly schedule. It's mainly the shortage of clergy that has pressed the C of E into loosening the rules. One wonders, will churchgoing ever revive, and will the number of ministers and clergy increase enough to bring the reinstatement of weekly worship? Usually, the reduction in frequency of services is a sad indication of decline, though some of our congregations have lived for a long time with gatherings only once or twice a month.

In contrast to this bowing to the inevitable by the Anglicans, my attention was drawn to literature put out by the Dementia Society. Interest in learning about dementia and how congregations can become 'dementia friendly' had grown apace. The Dementia Society's notes on how to cope with dementia and mild cognitive impairment (MCI) include a mention of churchgoing, with advice not often seen: 'If you attend a place of worship, continue to go regularly.' Also recommended are puzzles and word games such as crosswords, which are part of my daily routine, though I try not to combine both recommendations and do crosswords during church services. This all chimes in with other reports which claim that people involved in religion tend to be happier, healthier and live longer than those who are not.

Does this healthy view of religion include all religious activity? Colleague Ernest Baker recently drew my attention to a *Guardian* report last October titled *Belief is Back*, which describes situations where religion is problematical or surprising. We are familiar with debates about what Muslim women may or may not wear in France. But then, 'In the Russia that has emerged from the wreckage of the USSR, state atheism is decidedly a thing of the past. The country now declares itself loudly and proudly as Orthodox. President Putin is ostentatiously devout. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, dynamited on Stalin's orders in 1931, has been meticulously rebuilt. Even the KGB has its own church. Belief is back. Around the world, religion is once again politically centre stage.'

One may wonder if there are religious liberals among the Orthodox there. An attempt a few years ago to start a member group of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists in Moscow, alas came to naught.

The upcoming anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre has already prompted a film of the ghastly event described by historians as world changing. Strange now to think that in that early part of the 19th century, only 2% of the British population had the vote. On 16 August 1819, more than 60,000 peaceful protesters gathered in St Peter's Fields in Manchester to demand the right to elect their own MPs. Manchester didn't have an MP! The demonstration ended when local militia on horseback charged the protesters and cut them down with sabres, leaving 11 dead and many injured. I can recommend Joyce Marlowe's book *The Peterloo Massacre* (1969, 2018). I was impressed to learn how carefully organised and disciplined the marchers were. No weapons, not even sticks, to be carried. Inevitably I've been Unitarian-spotting, most notably John



Funny Old World

By John Midgley

Edward Taylor, a journalist who witnessed the slaughter and soon afterwards gathered some friends in Cross Street Chapel where they founded the then *Manchester Guardian*, still very much with us.

Saltburn by the Sea is where retiree minister colleague Margaret Kirk now lives. The delightful spring heatwave coincided with an opportunity for a visit.

Even in February we strolled with an ice-cream along the pier and were unable to resist the twopenny fruit machines in the amusement arcade. Happy days. Margaret led us to the end of Marine Parade where stands the quirky statue of Henry Pease (1807-1880). I have mentioned a woman blacksmith before, in Malham, North Yorkshire, but this creation comes from a different one, Hilary Cartmel, whose gallery is under construction in Styrrup, Doncaster.

In 2002 she rescued some scrap metal items from the Stockton and Darlington Railway to create this unusual depiction of Pease, as a Quaker industrialist in a top hat and with walking stick. Following, it is said, a vision, Pease founded Saltburn as a holiday resort, providing the opulent Zetland Hotel as well as affordable houses, many with a 'Pease' brick with his name on, set into the wall, in recognition of the developer. Though a devout Quaker he was not averse to including pleasure grounds in the town's facilities. As a peacemaker, in 1854 he visited the Tsar of Russia in an endeavour to talk him out of the Crimean war. All this while working diligently as director of the Stockton to Darlington Railway.

The plaque accompanying his statue also pays tribute to Unitarian minister, the Rev Henry Solly (1813-1903), who shared Pease's concern for an improved life for working people. Solly became a Chartist. He supported many Radical causes, such as universal suffrage, free education, repeal of the Corn Laws, co-operatives, anti-slavery, early closing for shops and Sunday opening for museums. In the early 1860s he took a lead in founding working men's clubs, though as a teetotaler he did not want them to sell alcohol.

This endeavour evolved into the Club and Institute Union (CIU), hundreds of clubs that became enormously successful and not only provide places for workers to relax and drink but were, it was said, 'designed to help create a temperate, moderate, working class interested in education and devoted to class mutuality.' One can see how these two Henrys would get along. I imagine them strolling in the sunshine on Saltburn Pier, the only pier on the north east coast of England, discussing latest town developments. A Quaker and a Unitarian talking politics. Excellent. Perhaps they even enjoyed an ice cream, though I doubt if they played the twopenny fruit machines. I wonder if Henry Solly also wore a top hat?

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Letters to the Editor

Psychopaths can be emotional terrorists

To the Editor:

These are my own thoughts in reflection to the letter published in the 9 February edition: 'Narcissism can be a force for good'.

I too enjoyed Ian Brown's article on psychopaths.

The word narcissism comes from a Greek myth about a boy who had such a distorted self image that he fell in love with his image in a lake. So much so that he eventually fell in and drowned. To a certain extent we can all have narcissistic tendencies, and we call this healthy narcissism, for there is nothing wrong with loving ourselves and giving ourselves a little bit of self praise.

But if it goes beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, it becomes malignant narcissism, and can be classified as a mental illness, and the personality can change without warning into a real Jekyll and Hyde. You find yourself dealing with two totally different people living in the same body. The narcissistic mind isn't capable of logical behaviour; they show no empathy and will often try to make you suffer if you try to put your point across. They live with a distorted image of perfection they have created for themselves, and are in total denial of any of the pain that can cause. They can even see themselves as the victim. Living with, or dealing with this kind of narcissism is like being with an emotional terrorist.

They can be seen as arrogant and have a glandular opinion of themselves. However as long as they feel you are playing up to them, and feeding their ego (which they badly need) by pointing out how good and perfect they are, they will come across as quite normal. If they, however, see the lack of perfection in the other person, they will lash out with the most awful verbal abuse, or say something very offensive. If you try to point out your opinion, or tackle them about their irrational behaviour, they will again abuse. Speaking from personal experience, it can put you in a war zone, from which you can never win.

Jenny Klavas
Macclesfield

Overpopulation causes environmental decline

To the Editor:

I read with interest the very thought provoking article by The Rev Bob Janis-Dillon. ('Our story is killing us' *Inquirer*, 9 February)

I also read, 'Earth has all the time in the world' by our editor Colleen Burns, another interesting article from a slightly different point of view.

However, one of the main reasons the world's resources are running out is that the human species is too prolific. Again, religion is – or should be – at the front of this debate. It is a fact that several of the world's religions actively encourage families to produce as many children as they can. (I recognise that in the less-developed parts of the world it has been seen as an economic necessity to have as many sons as possible.)

Which politician, in this country or any other, dare say that we need to limit the number of children we produce? China, rightly, tried to do this and people in China and by many religious leaders and others across the globe scorned the government.

The hard facts are that we are running out of water, land and the natural resources we need to support the peoples of the world. The production of more and more products will not save us, nor will science, despite how much research we do or how many innovative ideas we have. Only by limiting population growth in every corner of the world do we have any hope for future generations.

The United Nations, all faith groups, all political parties, need urgently to start by educating the populations at large (particularly women) into recognising these facts.

We as Unitarians should be at the forefront of these discussions. I hope we can all distribute these recent issues of *The Inquirer* into as many secondary schools, universities, libraries, political parties and discussion groups as possible. Start now everyone; buy extra copies and distribute them.

To quote the Rev Bob Janis-Dillon our stories need to incorporate these facts. The story of the Lily pads on the pond, multiplying two by two until the pond is full, is a good illustration to start with. We need to invent more stories

and quickly.

I only hope we are not too late.

Wilna Roberts

Sevenoaks Unitarians

Principles lacking in keynote protest

To the Editor:

I was disturbed to read the comments made by Paul Lindsay Dawson in the article 'Objections raised to GA keynote' (*The Inquirer*, 9 February). Whatever happened to the core principles of Unitarianism – listening to the views of others, even if you strongly disagree with them, with tolerance and respect; valuing the worth and dignity of every individual? Albeit, the choice of GA speaker may prove to have been a misjudgement, surely the best way to deal with what one objects to is, first, to have the courtesy to listen carefully to what someone actually has to say on the subject, and then effectively counter it with reason and well-informed argument rather than by 'manning barricades' and waving sound-bite placards?

Catherine Andrews

Horsham Congregation

Workplace happiness is an important topic

To the Editor:

As the representative of Cirencester Unitarians at the forthcoming General Assembly meetings I look forward to reasoned debate and some robust differences of opinion. What would seem unacceptable to my congregation, however, would be disrespectful behaviour towards someone who has been invited to speak on a topic which is causing heartache to many people: poor workplace relationships, bullying, inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Many of us will know people who have decided to change jobs because of this, possibly to their disadvantage. Look for Lord Mark Price and you find an article by him in HR Review 'State of the Nation's Workplace Happiness'. This is not a party political matter – it affects all of us, not least our Ministers and Essex Hall staff. Right relationships are at the heart of religion. Let's see what we can learn.

Jane Howarth

Secretary, Cirencester Unitarian Fellowship

Letters to the Editor

Whither Unitarian tolerance?

To the Editor:

I have not followed the Facebook debate reported in *The Inquirer* (9 February). But, even if what is reported is biased, it is disturbing because it amounts to a 'no platform' campaign. One of the fundamental tenets of a liberal democracy is the 19th-century quote, 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'. This quote is attributed to Evelyn Beatrice Hall, a contemporary of Voltaire and Thomas Paine. It seems that Jo James finds Price guilty by association with a government from which Price resigned, and Joy Foster also seems to be unwilling to hear what he has to say. Worst of all is the comment attributed to a member of the Wakefield Congregation who appears to equate conservatives with 'neo-Nazis'.

In a separate article in the same issue of *The Inquirer* I gain the impression from Claire MacDonald that happiness at work is not a significant issue. Perhaps it is of little significance to some lucky enough to have a rewarding occupation. But to many people, especially in poor communities, a job which offers sufficient income to pay the rent, feed the family, and have some pride in one's achievements would be transformative. In Hull, as in many parts of Britain, there are people who want a job, and others who are constantly under financial and personal stress because their employment is precarious. There is a lot that needs to be done in Britain to address fair and rewarding work for all.

I am critical of the policies of the current government in relation to people in hardship and I am especially critical of the way that the DWP, under ministerial direction, implements government policies. There are many people in the UK who are unfairly treated by current government policies. I do not know if Price has any influence on the current government, but I will hear what he says, and respond especially if I 'disapprove of what he has to say'. If he is as influential as some seem to think then this is a rare opportunity to speak truth to power. I have looked at an opinion piece Price wrote in the HR review (4 January)

in which he reports that compared to other developed countries, UK workplaces are lower 'for: pride in our organisations, feeling respected, fairly rewarded, views being heard, doing something worthwhile and workplace relationships'.

I am interested in hearing what a conservative has to offer in response to these findings.

On his own web site Price says of himself that he 'has spent over thirty years unlocking the power of people in organisations'.

Could this be why some people in both formal and informal positions of power in the UK Unitarian movement do not want him to be heard?

Ralph Catts

Minister, Hull Unitarians

Haranguing is not the way forward

To the Editor:

I was dismayed to read the 9 February issue of *The Inquirer*, in which two articles appeared – both dealing with the fact that Lord Mark Price has been invited to be the keynote speaker at the 2019 Annual Meetings. It cannot be denied that this country is in political and economic turmoil; moreover, the choice of subject matter would appear to be infelicitous – possibly, even, irrelevant. However, we are not supposed to be a political organisation and should guard against allowing our political leanings to obscure some of the issues in this case.

What I have learned, from the articles about Lord Mark Price, is that he comes from a non-conformist background, is a decent and democratic person, that he works to promote Fair Trade issues, and that he has much to offer to those with a Unitarian background. From my own research, it seems that he spent about 18 months in government and relinquished his post 18 months ago. Is he to be blamed for all the evils of the world?

We issued an invitation to Lord Mark Price to speak to us – how logical is it, now, for us to be planning a demonstration against him? Are we not able to give him a fair hearing – in a spirit of tolerance and moderation? Or have we already made up our minds that he is not worth hearing?

I don't think we can accuse the government of not listening, whilst at

the same time preparing to shout down, or boycott, an invited guest. We do need to speak up for ourselves, but not at the expense of forsaking standards of good manners and courtesy. Do we Unitarians really want to gain a reputation, in the wider world, for being aggressive, inflexible and unruly, when, ordinarily, we pride ourselves on our liberalism and fair-mindedness? Influential people within our denomination bear responsibilities; inciting protest, and encouraging placards and badges to be taken into lectures, in my view, should not be part of their remit; are they sure they represent the views of the majority?

Last year, after the Annual Meetings, I wrote to *The Inquirer*, after one of my congregation's delegates was booed, when he attempted to convey his members' views to those present. I felt then, as I feel now, that this was unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour. To those who feel that protest, demonstration, and haranguing are the way forward, I would say, 'Please, think again!'

We may be in danger of setting aside the finer principles to which we have traditionally adhered.

Anne Mills

On behalf of the Church Council of Bury Unitarian Church

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only.

UWG concerned about 'empty pockets'

Registration is now open for the next Unitarian Women's Group (UWG) conference in October. It's planned for 18-20 October at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow, and will focus on ageing. Below is an account of last year's gathering.

By Lynne Varley

Having attended a number of UWG conferences, I was looking forward to it and was not disappointed. I had hardly been in the Nightingale Centre when I encountered a group of members entering from the opposite end. I was surrounded by their warm welcome. The UWG weekend envelops everyone in an empathetic cocoon of care and concern.

Friday evening, led by Jo O'Sullivan, Sue MacFarlane and Kate Dean, started with a warm-up of everyone giving their first name and why, if we knew, our parents had chosen it. This was followed by a three-minute talk to our neighbour regarding how we felt at that particular moment. My neighbour was very tired because of her commitments that week and I wished her a restful weekend.

More serious discussions followed in the first part of the AGM, where concerns for bursaries, for women in straitened circumstances that would like to attend the conference, should continue to be given. There was also discussion regarding whether bursaries should be provided for the leaders of the weekend. These were left for members to consider until Sunday, when we would return to them in the second part of the AGM. The appointment of officers was passed without competition. Sue Wilcox volunteered to represent the UWG at the upcoming Unitarian General Assembly Meetings.

Jo O'Sullivan updated us on our successful motion at the 2018 General Assembly meetings on government austerity measures, particularly in relation to women. Derek McAuley, as Chief Officer of the GA, reported on what he had done: -

- Attended the Women's Budget Group meeting and interestingly, was one of only a few men there.
- The link to the report launched at the meeting may be found at: <https://bit.ly/2PiYeyI>
- Derek also talked to the Equality Trust director on how the Resolutions might complement each other.
- He planned to lobby Government before the Budget.

We watched three videos on the views of the Green Party and the Labour Party regarding their stance on ridding the country of austerity. Theresa May was shown at the Conservative Party conference declaring that austerity was over. Nothing had been found on the Liberal Democrat Party's view.

Sue MacFarlane introduced an initiative that she was involved in in Belper. 'Sharing Not Wasting' helps to reduce food waste. This entails taking discarded food from food industry surplus (e.g. Co-op, Tesco, etc) once a week. Perfectly good food that would otherwise go into landfill – misshapen veg, outer packets of crisps open etc. and distributing it to anyone who *wants* it. This includes people who are struggling to make ends meet, but not exclusively. An interesting fact was that there was about 80/20 split women to men using this facility. An indicator, it was felt, of austerity's disproportionate effect on women.

Other initiatives that members were involved with included 'Incredible Edibles' in Wem (Sonya Richards) – vegetable growing on a plot of waste ground supplied by the County Council that anyone in the community could work on and



The Unitarian Women's Group welcomes registrations for the next conference in October.

anyone could pick the results. A community fridge in the offices of the Citizens' Advice Bureau in Godalming – anyone could help themselves.

Karen Hanley drew our attention to WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) which aims to change the pension laws because women who were born in the 1950s, missed out on a pension at the age of 60. There had been 13 debates in Parliament and this made no difference. She reported that some women were choosing between heating and eating. This had now gone to the United Nations to investigate. Women complained that the measure had been brought in too quickly without chance for them to plan.

Following this, we divided into groups and discussed and acted out our ideal worlds. No more conflict, no more plastic, no more loneliness, no more hunger etc.

To celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the winning of the vote for some women, we listened and sang to a number of their hymns, before tucking into yet another lovely meal.

We reconvened for a less serious evening with a plethora of talent – poetry reading, stories, singing and a playlet.

We continued the AGM on Sunday before chapel. There was enough money to provide bursaries for women in straitened circumstances, wishing to attend the UWG Conference. Money is provided to the facilitators for costs such as photocopying, etc.

It was decided that a speaker on the subject of 'period poverty' for the UWG at GA would be invited. Everything that was done this weekend was carried out with concern and thoughtfulness for each other. What a shame this could not be bottled!

The theme this year is 'Women and Ageing'. We will be looking at specific issues for women and the ageing process. The conference will be a series of workshops, discussion sessions, sharing of our experiences and stories. It will be an opportunity to discuss, reflect, share and have fun together. All women are welcome to join us. The weekend will be facilitated by Cathie Masztalerz and Sara Wilcox. For bookings, contact the Nightingale Centre: info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk

For information on the UWG, contact Margaret Robinson: margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

Lynne Varley is a member of the Unitarian Women's Group.